



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE TEACHING OF IDEALS<sup>1</sup>

---

JAMES H. TUFTS  
University of Chicago

---

The specific aspect of the subject which I shall discuss may perhaps best be called "The Teaching of Social and Civic Ideals," and I am going to speak of it with special reference to our high-school problems. It is not necessary to say that during the last ten years we have been living in an atmosphere very different from that which some of us remember in college and public life. The whole decade has been full of challenge to the existing order and standards. Underneath has been developing a new idealism, which has not always found recognition or expression. For the President of the United States to appeal to Congress to rescind its former action upon the matter of tolls for the Panama Canal, and to base this appeal simply upon the fact that other nations understand the treaty in a certain way, is one of the latest illustrations of a higher ideal of honor. I believe that the American people will support that stand. A change in attitude, a change in civic and political morality, has been coming on, although we may not have been fully aware of it. It is our possibility and opportunity as teachers to help in interpreting to our children this new social and civic consciousness in which we are living. The ideals which we are to teach should help our children to become themselves active workers in bringing better things into the age in which they are to work.

The ideals we teach must have at least three characteristics: In the first place, we are training pupils for citizenship in a democratic country. The other addresses of the day have sounded the democratic note so clearly that it is not necessary for me to expand this point. Indeed, as Principal McAndrew's doctrines are put into practice we may perhaps hear, from the teachers and pupils of some of the schools represented here, a testimony like that of

<sup>1</sup> Read at the meeting of the Harvard Teachers' Association, Cambridge, Massachusetts, March 7, 1914.

the washwoman whose husband had formerly been severe in his methods of conjugal discipline. A social worker induced the husband to sign the pledge and a little later asked the wife how matters were going. "It's a different place," said the wife; "I'd hardly know John; he's more like a friend than a husband." Yet it is necessary to reiterate that we are not to teach ideals to those who are to form a subject class, and need only to learn obedience to authority. Our children, the children of our high schools, are to be among the rulers of a community which is constantly obliged to change and make its own laws and take its own responsibilities.

In the second place, any ideals which we now teach our children must be moving and not static ideals. This is a rapidly moving country, and the particular civic problems which we have before us are not to be met by the "old-fashioned" civic virtues. Take, for example, the evils of the cities. Before the reasons for these evils had come to be so generally known as they are today, Dr. Eliot pointed out that some of the great difficulties came because our cities were attempting to do things in which we had previously had no experience. That was true twenty-five years ago, and is more emphatically true today, with our enormous cities and our great industrial development. Only by constant study of the changing conditions of our life can we discover and frame ideals of righteousness, justice, and truth which will guide our boys and girls in their tasks as citizens.

In the third place, the ideals we teach must take firm hold upon reality. The founder of idealism was sometimes wont to insist upon the pure and separate character of ideals. Plato set before us the good and just, distinctly and clearly modeled like the statue made by the artist. There is a gain in thus getting an ideal clearly before us out in the open. It is a good thing that people have one day in the week different from the others. But, after all, any ideal that is separate and detached pays a penalty. The constant criticism of such ideals is that they tend to discourage those who take them up; that they are held for a while and then abandoned. We are not to teach pupils something that is merely pretty to look at and admire while they are in school, but rather something that is to be a working principle of life.

What are the agencies which the teacher can use in the teaching of ideals? The first agency is as old as the human race, the agency of group life and group influence. It is commonplace, of course, to speak about the groups into which we are born and which later receive us: the family, the school, the playmates, the athletic team, the church, the college, the political party, the profession. Every one of these groups is founded upon some ideal; its influence is not merely the influence of one or the other individual upon his fellow; it is that of the idea for which the group as a whole is standing and which it deems proper. The lawyer who does not meet the code of his professional ethics feels something stronger than individual disapproval of the members of his profession. He feels in some way that he has betrayed the whole profession. The boy in school, on an athletic team, or in any of his other groups, who does not conform to the standards of that group, feels more than the individual pressure upon him. He feels the condemnation of the group as a unit. Arnold of Rugby was the first to see the full significance of that and to use it. The English public schools have since followed along that line. They use their school groups as perhaps their greatest agency. There are some evils in school life that we cannot help in any other way. Cheating in examinations is one. I do not know anything about the high schools in the East, but in the high schools in the West there is altogether too much dishonesty. We may talk to our children and get their parents to talk to them until the end of doom, but we can never secure honesty in school examinations except through the aid of a group spirit supporting and enforcing a group standard of honor. We know what certain colleges have done in maintaining the honor system by the students themselves. Just at present, the students at the University of Chicago are trying to instal it. We have a very difficult university in which to introduce it because we are so heterogeneous a body. A powerful public opinion is not so easily created. Yet I have strong hope that our students will put the work through.

Of course there are often ideals of school honor which are much in need of enlightenment. The story has been told of a high-school boy who played on a team when ineligible, and who pleaded in

excuse: "I thought the honor of the school was at stake; we had to win that game."

It is a difficult task to change such standards of honor, and yet it is just this difficult thing that has to be done if the most effective teaching of ideals of certain kinds is to be brought into play at all. The advantage of the general group influence is that it is a tremendous power to action, and that it will steady the one who needs support. Lord Haldane, who came from England to address the American Bar Association last summer, impressively stated the importance of the *Sittlichkeit*, the habitual morality of a people. We all, old as well as young, need its support to keep us in line on occasions of especial stress or sudden temptation. Build such a *Sittlichkeit* in your school groups.

But group morality has its serious defects. It is not likely to be progressive. It is more likely to enforce the old than to grasp for the new. And again the ideal of the group is not usually what the best members of the group cherish in their best moments; it is what the group as a whole is ready to stand by. Teachers of morality, therefore, have sought other methods, methods that should be more flexible, and should represent the higher reaches of aspiration. The first of these Plato found in use in the education of his day. Indeed it is far older than Plato. Art and literature have been used by primitive peoples to impress ideals of courage upon the young. Dr. Charles Eastman in his *Indian Boyhood* tells how he was taught to love heroism, to admire the brave, successful hunter and warrior, by all the tales of the bravery of his ancestors with which his grandmother filled his youthful imagination. This agency is especially valuable in the earlier years of the high school. We can go a little farther in our appreciation of it than Plato seems to go. He sees in it an appeal to habit and emotion. He would have music and rhythm steal their way into the very fiber of the child's life, "by harmony making them harmonious, by rhythm rhythmical." But he regards art as a sort of imitation. When listening to music or drama, he thought, the mind is largely passive and does not penetrate to principles. Nor does the artist himself grasp reality. We, on the other hand, are quick to assert that the great artist sees not less but more than

other men. The imagination in both its scientific and its artistic use helps build new realms of thought and action. If human progress means constantly exchanging the meager world of past limitation and past habit for a freer and more adequate life, then the vision of the artist and the scientist may work together. The world which they build is more real because it is the world that is to be. Great characters have been citizens of such a world, and to bring a boy or girl to know them means an introduction into the world of larger horizons, of finer perceptions, of working ideals.

But art and literature none the less have their limitation. Enthusiasm is likely to pass, unless there is not only a vision to be seen but a work to be done. As the method of scientific study comes to claim a larger and larger share in school life, it must be drawn into moral education if this is to claim the respect of the pupil. We must make an intellectual as well as an emotional appeal. Let us then name as a third agency in teaching ideals the study of the problems of life by a *scientific, constructive* method.

The scientific, constructive method in dealing with ideals means first of all recognizing what there is in actual life, business, industry, law, government, which is good, how this good has got here, and on what basis it rests. Second, it means a frank and open criticism of defects in our present life. Third, it means definite planning how to remedy these defects. We cannot expect to get ideals adopted simply by presenting them. As Professor Palmer has wisely said: "We rarely foresee the future of ourselves as the architect sees that of his building. . . . Usually the first prompter of action is an apprehension of some need, impoverishment, or pain. . . . Everywhere some restriction, limit, or need is our prompter to personal progress."

These statements, which may sound vague when made in general terms, will be clearer if we illustrate them from the two great fields of business and politics. There can be little question that a scientific and constructive method is needed in both. The most striking fact about business, particularly, is the confusion in our standards. In private life, as President Hadley has pointed out in his *Standards of Public Morality*, the American gentleman is on the whole generous, humane, and, in times of crisis, heroic. In

public, he is too often hard, forgetful of the other man. And certain investigations into business and political affairs have not yielded a reassuring result. Practices not long since considered good business are now crimes by law. A prominent man finds himself in danger of being prosecuted for acts which he says would in other countries be rewarded by the state. Words which have been watchwords in our history seem to be ambiguous. Congress aims to secure liberty and passes a certain law providing that a corporation shall not discharge a man because he belongs to a trade union. The Supreme Court holds that this is an infringement of liberty "which no government can justify in a free land." To be sure, it was liberty of association which Congress sought and liberty of contract which the court insisted upon. But who can wonder if common minds do not always see just what kind of liberty is part of our national ideal?

What can we do to clarify and construct better working ideals in the field of business? First, let us show how much morality is actually involved in business as this is now carried on. We talk a great deal about the evils of business life; it is easy to forget the good. I think the good and evil are almost like the iceberg; it is the smaller part that shows. Think of the great system of banking with the confidence involved. Think of the system of insurance contracts which guarantee to my wife or children when I am gone the benefit of my care. Contrast this with the distrust which prevails in savage life. Consider our whole system of trusteeship and the duties of agents. The more we can make these things clear to the minds of our prospective business men the more clearly we can show them that their whole life is to be built on moral structures that are solid, that are here because business cannot be supported without them. Such ideals are not fancies of the classroom. They are as real and stubborn as the laws of mathematics or of gravitation.

Or take an illustration from another part of business life; consider competition. This is one of the living questions which every boy or girl must face. There is also the advantage that it enters into the problems of school life, in scholarship, in athletics, and in social affairs of all kinds. Is competition right and good, or is it

wrong and bad? Instead of attempting to give a sweeping answer is it not possible to study in detail just what it does and what it does not do? It is easy for the boy to see that the school will get a better football team if men are tried out for the positions than if they are selected by lot, or because of the social standing of their parents. It is not difficult to see that in business if competition gets the right man into the right place or if it leads to discoveries of new inventions and better methods, it is an agency of progress.

But the other side of competition can be just as clearly seen. What is the most important thing for the athletic team? Very likely the first answer will be "to win the game." But it does not take a long process of questioning to bring out the answer that there is one thing more important, that is the game itself. And the game itself is absolutely impossible except on the assumption of fair play. When competition in business is made to mean, not winning by a better method, but defeating the other man at any cost, it is easy to see that we are ruining the game. Unless business can mean a larger, nobler life, it is like playing "dirty ball" and no pretext that competition is a law of nature can justify its methods.

Or consider the political ideals. Liberty now as in earlier years is one of the deepest demands of life. It is an ideal that we want to put before the children. It is something that no one who comes to Cambridge and stands in Memorial Hall can forget. But we can show the children that there is a liberty which they may help to work out. The liberty of 1776 was chiefly a liberty against control by political forces. We can show that today we require liberty in other lines. The danger of ignorance is much greater than the danger of oppression by foreign power. Our fathers were afraid that religious liberty might be invaded by government. Today it is not government but the machine which compels a man to work seven days in the week and deprives him of religious liberty. To think out these things step by step with our pupils is an effective way of teaching what I have called a constructive and scientific ideal.

So again of democracy. Democracy has always held up an ideal of equality. This equality in 1776 meant that no one is so



superior by birth and privilege that he has a divine right to rule another; it was in a certain sense negative. Today the point which needs emphasis is not that no one else is superior to us. It is rather that we must if possible make every citizen as nearly equal to the best as we can. We cannot successfully carry on democratic government except by this constant leveling-up, this constructive ideal.

In such ways we can make our idealism real and vital. Ideals which are built by the children on the basis of actual values, of discovered defects, and of pressing needs will not be easily cast aside as fanciful and imaginary; they will in many at least be a living power for the whole working life.

Why have I said nothing as to the personality of the teacher as an agency in the teaching of ideals? Because I have felt that this is so fundamental that it must be assumed in all the agencies rather than dealt with as a thing apart. All these other agencies are ways through which the teacher works. Group life and group standards are almost certain to be indifferent and may be bad without the right sort of help from the teacher. Lives of great men, images of literature, are likely to be lifeless things except as they are made reanimate through the living voice and living person. Discussions of business and politics may be cold and formal unless they come from a teacher who is actually interested in the life of his community.

I am always fascinated by the fresco which stands for Philosophy in the Boston Public Library. If you remember, it is Plato in conversation with a youth. Philosophy, however, did not mean for Plato a technical tradition. It meant love of wisdom and truth and above all love of the good. We may then put for Plato any teacher and we have in the fresco the symbol of his task and its method. For some of our ideals men have found symbols in single figures of beauty, of wisdom, or of justice. But for the teaching of ideals the true symbol is that of the two figures in friendly converse. It is in this common pursuit, this common task, that we can achieve the results which all true teachers crave. By such teaching we can do our part in the great social movement that is now going on.